

Overview – Connecticut Homeless Youth Count

Youth homelessness presents significant challenges to homeless providers. Conventional methodologies for collecting data on this sub-population are ineffective because homeless youth are less accessible than their adult counterparts, difficult to track down, and often unwilling to talk to the adult volunteers who seek to engage them. As a consequence, we have a very poor understanding of the scale of the issue and consequently have difficulty supporting our providers in effectively serving the needs of this population. CCEH has evaluated dozens of efforts around the country to count homeless youth, and have designed a state count of homeless youth based on the emerging best practices and lessons learned from other communities. Connecticut will be the first state to engage in a statewide effort to count homeless youth.

In order to obtain an accurate picture of the scale of youth homelessness in Connecticut, CCEH plans to undertake our count through the following two methods:

1. Basic State Count: Conduct a coordinated, standardized count across the state over one to two weeks in January. Provider-based leaders in each region will be trained to train others and promote the count in their area. This count will use a survey and distribution model deployed in a wide variety of service settings used by youth (including soup kitchens, shelters, mental health centers, and libraries). This count will collect data on youth who are visible to service providers within a certain timeframe or who can be encouraged via social media or other marketing means to come to specified settings during that timeframe. Care will be taken to utilize standardized trainings, instruments and protocols.

2. Special Focus Areas: In approximately five selected areas, CCEH will conduct an expanded project that includes: (1) the same approach as above, and also (2) peer-based estimation projects in local high schools, and (3) in-depth surveying of, or focus groups with, unstably housed youth to gather information about their awareness and use of local services. In addition, for added depth, we will ask youth service providers to supply their most recent annual data on homeless and unstably housed youth. Though not part of the official count, this is nonetheless a way to go deeper into numbers and characteristics of homeless youth in particular (and very different) areas of the state.

In the Focus Areas, we will include a school-based estimation project which will consist of a one-page survey to all students in grades 9-12 asking students for information about peers, friends and acquaintances who are unstably housed or homeless. The survey will meet Runway and Homeless Youth Data Standards and will be modeled on best practices already developed nationally.

Outcome: The count will provide reliable information to indicate the number of youth across Connecticut who experience homelessness, and – equally important – to understand the patterns and characteristics of this population. Characteristics such as: how long episodes of youth homelessness last, number of episodes of homelessness, social networks, family relationships, and whether it is possible for a youth to return home. Better data on youth homelessness will strengthen the ability of agencies to advocate for resources to address this issue, and for a better framework to allocate those resources.